

SONS OF THEIR FATHERS

Drawings by Warrant Pryor

By WILLIAM BROWN MELONEY

AS Pericles O'Brien swung out of Merchants' Exchange and turned eastward in California-st. he began liltng a bit of a nameless tune that invariably found its way to his lips when he was well pleased. And he was pleased this raw December morning; for he had just heard on "The Floor," which is where the city by the

Golden Gate keeps tally of its ventures by sea, that Benny Jordan was to be given command of the Pacific Navigation Company's liner Granada. But he had not gone twenty steps when he found himself face to face with Jordan's six feet of weather-bronzed manhood.

"Just heard the good news, Benny!" exclaimed Pericles with all his heartiness, and at that the hands of these two sea sons met in a red-blooded grip.

"But—but it isn't true, Pericles," answered Jordan grimly. "I'm not to get the Granada or any other command—in the Pacific Company. 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited—' and there, strong man though he was, Benny Jordan's voice fogged, and he broke the glance with which Pericles' searching gray gaze had been holding his.

For a moment the junior partner of the West Coast Wrecking & Salvage Company was at a loss for the right thing to say. He had seen pain of spirit in the depths of Benny Jordan's brown eyes; but only a commonplace would come to Pericles' tongue.

"Uptown pretty early, Benny, eh?" was what he said.

"Yes; I'm on my way to the Gold Coast offices to ask for a berth," and Jordan nodded upward toward the Merchants' Exchange building. "Maybe Nilsen and Rosenthal will give me a chance in one of their old wagons. They're not so particular about what newspapers say, or who—who your father was, or what he did, as the Pacific Company is. Three times and out! This will make the third time I've been passed for promotion."

"You're not going near swine like Nilsen and Rosenthal till we've had a walk and a talk about this thing," declared Pericles, linking an arm in Jordan's and turning round toward Montgomery-st. "There was once a President of the United States who used to say, Benny, that before writing a letter one ought to walk eleven miles—and then not write the letter. Have you walked eleven miles this morning?"

"Why, of course I haven't."

"But you've written a letter of resignation, eh?"

"Yes; but I haven't posted it yet," and Jordan hesitated at sight of a mailbox.

"Good! And you're not going to post it until we've had a walk," and Pericles O'Brien swept his friend along at a stride that drew the eye of many a passerby after their two tall, rangy, ulstered forms.

That walk ended nearly an hour afterward, when Pericles and Jordan parted in Market-st. in front of a large yellow brick building and Pericles said:

"You go back to the Granada, Benny, and sit tight as her chief officer till you get a signal from me."

TWO minutes later Pericles was entering the private office of Samuel Ashton, vice president and general manager of the Pacific Navigation Company, which was on the seventh floor of that yellow brick building, and Ashton was saying:

"Why in thunder, Pericles, don't you keep regular office hours? I've been trying to get you on the 'phone since nine o'clock. Laysan tell you?"

"No; but here I am."

"So I perceive," laughed Ashton, and then he went on seriously. "Say, Pericles, do you know where we can get hold of a first-class man for a command? Got to get a skipper for the Granada before the end of the week. Know anybody along the beach?"

"Yes, I know a man," announced Pericles with grim slowness as he took off his overcoat and threw it on top of his battered felt hat on a chair behind him. "You know him too,—Benny Jordan, the Granada's own chief officer."

As Jordan's name left Pericles' lips Ashton held up his hands and shook his trim gray head.

"Benny Jordan," repeated Pericles, leveling his gaze decisively on Ashton, "is your man!"

"Impossible! Can't be, Pericles. And I want you to know that I am sorrier about not being able to give Jordan the Granada than anything I've ever had to do since I've sat in this office."

"That ship should go to him. It's his due."

"Oh, I'll admit his seniority and unquestioned competence, his twelve years of service and all that; but look here, Pericles," and Ashton picked up a newspaper clipping from a pile at the side of his desk and began reading:

"The Pacific Navigation Company's Granada arrived yesterday from Panama and the Central American Coast, in command of Chief Officer Benjamin Jordan, who took charge of the big liner at the isthmus three weeks ago, upon the sudden death of Captain John Wells, who was—' and so on and so on. But here's the point, 'Chief Officer Jordan is a son of the Captain Benjamin Jordan who wrecked the Alaskan Company's liner Kodiak on the North Coast two years ago and sent one hundred and twenty-one souls headlong into eternity. That terrible disaster which will never be forgotten—'

"But why go on reading, Pericles? There's nearly a column of it, a rehash of the whole horrible thing. And that's only one newspaper. Everyone of them printed nearly the same thing the day after the Granada got in. This morning they have it again." Ashton threw down the clipping and read from a newspaper spread before him. "It was reported yesterday that Chief Officer Jordan, who brought the liner Granada home in place of the late Captain John Wells, is to be appointed to the command. It will be remembered that he is a son of the late Captain Benjamin Jordan who—' Here, you read it," and Ashton handed the paper to Pericles.

"I've read that yellow sheet and the others too," answered the giant in a low tone and fastening the blue eyes under Ashton's heavy brows in his characteristic searching way. "Are the newspapers running your business, Sam Ashton?"

"No; but the Pacific Navigation Company pays divi-

dends by carrying passengers, my good friend. And to carry passengers you must have public confidence. And to have public confidence you must have men in command of your ships about whom newspapers can't print things like that."

PUBLIC confidence doesn't come to men because of what that kind of newspapers say or do not say about them, but because of their own works and the faith they have in themselves," cut in Pericles, straightening himself to his full height, "because they're men and not mice when the time comes to do the right thing by their fellow men. The most human thing in the whole human scheme of things is the public, the masses of the people. You appoint Benny Jordan, and tell the public yourself why you have done it,—because he is a skilful navigator, an experienced seaman, an officer who has served your company faithfully and efficiently for twelve or thirteen years.

"And the public will answer that you're very much of a man, and so will the decent newspapers. I'll bet there isn't one of the thousands who have read all this stuff who wouldn't tell you, if you could ask him, that he resented it the moment he laid eyes on it. A newspaper is no stronger than the human justice for which it stands. Ask any reputable editor, and he'll tell you that. I know a lot of newspaper men, and they're about the humanest of humans. You submit the thing to them, and they'll tell you it was a rotten shame to print it, and that the fellows responsible ought to be horsewhipped. And, anyway, what has been said about Benny Jordan? Nothing. It's his father they've struck. And that boy isn't any more responsible for his father than you for yours or I was for mine!"

Pericles' voice had reached a pitch of fervent tensi-ty, and now it suddenly dropped to a conversational tone. "Anybody ever appoint you, Sam Ashton, to visit the sins or shortcomings of fathers upon their sons? I have never heard of or met any human being with that commission. Suppose you should suddenly go off the track, lose your head over some woman, run off with your company's money, raise the deuce generally—"

Ashton started as if to protest.

"Oh, you're human, Sam, and such things happen every day. Now, tell me, would it be fair for me, if you did those things, to turn against your two fine boys—tell them I couldn't help them or employ them because their father was a thief and a scamp?"

"No!" said Ashton in a barely audible tone, and he swung round in his swivel chair and looked out of a window. It was several minutes before he turned to face Pericles again, and as the giant looked down into his eyes he felt like liltng his nameless bit of a tune, but instead he kept on hammering his nail.

"You go to the decent newspapers yourself—forget the yellow outfit—and put it to them. Ask 'em if they think Benny Jordan's been given a square deal, and—"

"Ben Jordan's Captain of the Granada!" said Ashton with a decisive snap of his jaws. "And I'm going to the bat with the newspapers!"

"Sam Ashton," said Pericles, taking him by the hand, "you're very much of a man!"

IN the hour that Pericles O'Brien left Ashton's office and went to his own he was whisked away from San Francisco to Seattle by an important business telegram, and so he did not see Benny Jordan again. All that he had time to do was write him a note telling him that he knew the Granada's new commander couldn't help making good.

And Samuel Ashton "went to bat" with the newspapers in man-to-man fashion, and the eyes of this corporation head were opened very wide. He discovered that newspaper editors were not bloodless automata; but human beings willing to admit that sometimes they committed injustices, and that Benny Jordan had been treated shamefully. And even as Pericles O'Brien had called Ashton very much of a man, so did these editors, both to his face and in print.

The junior partner of the West



"Steady there! Stick out your jaw!" warned Pericles.